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Reform or Revolution

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I

WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

An Englishman is apt to shy at the word revolution. It calls up in his mind visions of the guillotine, of barricades, of burnings, and of sudden death. Even now England suffers from shell-shock due to that vast explosion in France 130 years ago. As a matter of fact, a revolution may be entirely peaceful; it need not entail the shedding of a single drop of blood. Though the English revolution of 1649, when a republic of Puritans replaced a feudal monarchy, came at the end of a long civil war, the counter revolution of 1660—masked in histories as the "Restoration"—was, save for some few executed in revenge, quite free from bloodshed. Passing over the so-called revolution of 1688, which was merely a change of kings, that of the Reform Act, 1832, when

government by wealth supplanted government by feudal lords, if carried through by fear, was also unattended by violence. Nor did the horrors of the French Revolution begin until the crowned heads of Prussia, Austria and Piedmont had declared war on France in order to restore the Monarchy, and Louis and the nobles had openly sided with these foreigners. A great deal has been made of the crimes of the Bolsheviks. But now that we can see through the barrage of lies maintained round Russia by our capitalist Press, it is clear that much the same happened there as in France. After the Soviets gained control in October 1917, they executed none save murderers and brigands until May 1918, when French and British diplomatic agents were actively fomenting a counter revolution.

What in reality is a revolution? The word has many meanings. Thus people speak of revolutions in thought, in society, in education and so forth, but here we are concerned only with those in the sphere of Government. A political revolution may be defined as *a change in Government involving a radical change in*

social ideals. If, for instance, a people governed by organised wealth were to dethrone a king and set up a republic, the real power remaining the same, that would be a revolution only in name. England to-day is a limited monarchy and France and the United States republics, but all alike are governed by "Big Business." On the other hand, self-government in place of rule by foreigners would emphatically be a revolution, because the ideals of the people under the first policy are quite different from those under the second. The object of foreigners is to retain the mastery; therefore, they teach the people to be docile and obedient. Self-government or Democracy, on the contrary, makes for self-respect and independence in thought and action. It involves a complete change in outlook.

Again the word would not apply to a labour government in England, with Messrs. Thomas, Bevin and Clynes at the head, for it would mean a continuance of the present capitalist system, shorn only of its worst features. But if a Labour government, pledged to the guild system, came into power, that would be a

revolution, because with industries based on guilds, social ideals would entirely alter. So in India, if a bureaucracy of Indians replaced the English bureaucracy, it would modify but little the face of Indian society. It would still suffer from the incurable vices of that system, whether in India or elsewhere, its aloofness from and distrust of the people, its love of rule and precedent, its lack of vision and its rigidity. In what essentials does government by Lord Sinha or Dr. Sapru differ from government by Sir Harcourt Butler or Mr. Vincent?

Revolution in the proper sense, does not connote violence. You may have violent changes of Government—like a South American *pronunciamento*—without the slightest change in society. The essential point is the change in social ideals, and the change of government which brings this about, may or may not be caused by violence. That in the past it has often been so caused is due to the fact that the governing classes have usually taken up the sword in order to resist the people's will, and in particular, that they have called in foreign

aid. It has never occurred to them, that when the majority of the people intend a radical change, they should quietly yield up their power.

Of all revolutions, the conquest of a civilised people by foreigners is perhaps the worst. For, from its nature, it debases, and always must debase their character. Gone is their pride of country and with it their self-respect. They must learn to bow the head to their masters, to imitate their culture and follow their ideas. If I am ever in the will of others, is it likely that I can keep the virtues of a freeman? Is it not more probable that I shall learn to be humble and submissive? If in such a system, the more energetic tend to decline on riches, or to become upper servants to their masters, how should they be blamed? All the noblest paths of human thought are under a bar. We have all heard of the results of environment in nature, how it destroys one form of life and multiplies another. *In a conquered country the environment tends to eliminate the lion and to breed the sheep.* In the truest sense, foreign rule is immoral.

II

THE WAY OF REFORM

The aim of reform is to advance without disturbance of law and order, and to build on existing foundations. Its ideal is a gradual increase of wealth, of happiness,—

> 'Of freedom slowly broadening down
> from precedent to precedent.'

That is the theory. How does it work in practice? Take English history from the year 1800 to date. The chief landmarks of reform in this century and a quarter are the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1827, Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the Reform Act of 1867, the Disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869, the Education Act in 1870, the Local Govern-

ment Act in 1888, and the Reform Act of 1918.

If freedom has broadened, it has broadened at the speed of a snail. The Corn Laws of 1819 were a price of class legislation which starved the poor for the benefit of the landlord and the parson. Yet it took a quarter of a century and a bitter and long agitation to win such a small measure of justice as their repeal. It was only after another quarter of a century that education became free and compulsory. And so with other reforms. See also the House of Lords. That such a grotesque survival from the Middle Ages should still linger on, in spite of a history which is one long chronicle of class selfishness and open or veiled war against all reform, shows how little is achieved by piecemeal legislation. Englishmen are notoriously intolerant of ideas, and in the House of Lords they have their reward.

During all this period of progress on constitutional lines, generations of poor have been born, have toiled long hours for a pittance and have sunk to the tomb with hope dead and

grievances unredressed. Always some bogey such as "Socialism," "Anarchy" or "Bolshevism" has been flourished to daunt the eager and frighten the timid. Always under some pretext or symbol, such as "national welfare," or "national interests," the possessing classes have clung to power. In place of "national" read "class," and you have the reality behind these masks.

To those willing to accept England's rate of progress, we put this question: "What about the children? Are you willing that the children should grow up in the same or nearly the same world as that which so outrages your finer feelings? "People talk of sacrificing, themselves, for their children. Is it not the highest, the best sacrifice to exert oneself to secure for them a world with nobler hopes and wider opportunities then, for instance, the England of a Lloyd George and the India of a Chelmsford? In the broad view, to heap up riches so that one's children may be functionless parasites on Society is to do both them and the State a disservice. We ought rather to bend our energies to securing for all honest

workers a fuller life than our own. How is it that in England democracy has made such little headway against privilege and wealth? The answer seems to lie in the essential conservatism of man. Give him food and housing and clothes such as were his father's wont, and he is hard to move. To rouse him, you must kindle his emotions. You must hold up before his eyes some goal, to win which no sacrifice seems too great, no pain but trivial, which thrills his soul with the magic of a great ideal. Then only will he show the stuff within him, and reveal the vast abilities hidden in even the humblest citizen. "The war has proved for ever," remarked the "Times," "That idealism in action is the master force in modern politics."

Now, reforms do not do this. They fail to bring into play any great motive force. They cannot stir the average man out of the rut of convention and custom, because they do not make him feel it worth while. They do not quicken; they do not inspire. Hence the long-drawn agitations needed to wipe out some gross abuse, or to win a tiny instalment of

liberty. The mass of the people remain inert and so the momentum behind the reformers is small. A spear-head alone is not enough; to strike home you must also have a haft.

Taking it at face value, diarchy has this same weakness. *Diarchy is merely bureaucracy painted white.* But, even were it otherwise, who would dare or suffer for reforms through Diarchy? Be it never so seductively painted, it can never touch the hearts of the people. They see too well that the essence of freedom is *power* and that power still rests in the hands of the officials.

After all, what is the system to which the reformists pin their faith? A scheme whereby the bureaucracy, which retains control, is to "train" Indians for self-government, by means of coalition, cabinets composed partly of officials and partly of Indian Ministers. Will the officials train for self-government? Will men whose whole training has been autocratic, whose class and race interests are bound up with ascendency, whose traditions are all of despotic rule,—will such as these cast aside everything, training, interests, and traditions,

and become apostles of liberty? As well expect Lord Curzon to preach Socialism or Sir G. Younger to co-operate with Pussyfoot Johnson! "I believe because it is impossible," cried once a devout Christian. That is the only way in which one can have faith in Diarchy as a School for Freedom.

But even were the officials willing, how can they teach democratic government? Such a government trusts in the people, speaks for them, feels with them, hopes with them. It is, in short, the executive organ of the people. It rests not on official rule or musty precedent; rather it seeks inspiration from men such as a Pym or a Cobden, a Washington or a Mazzini. In thought and aims, it differs from bureaucracy as a free eagle from a barn-door fowl. What folly to imagine that officials, men of rule and precedent, can be right teachers for democracy!

But, it may be urged, they come from a democratic country. That is not quite correct. In reality, England is not a democracy; it is a country governed by organised wealth. And the class from which the officials are drawn

is notoriously in favour of upholding this plutocracy. The root of popular government is not in it. So far then as they are constrained to part with power, they will naturally seek to give it to the wealthiest classes. That, indeed, is the inner meaning of the franchise rules.

Consider, also, the record of Diarchy up-to-date. Mark the political persecutions; the open support of the liquor trade, the treatment of the Assam labourers, the Dharwar shootings, and the long list of measures vetoed. Where is the promised new era? Where the beginning of popular rule? If this be the path to freedom, it leads through a strange country.

If reformers imagine themselves as taking one trench after another, until finally they plant the flag of freedom in the citadel, they make a sad mistake. They err, because they suppose that the enemy will remain on the defensive whilst they advance. But so far from serving inactive, he conducts a defence quite as vigorous and well-planned as the attack. In the first place, he plays for time. When indignation waxes fierce owing to some outrage like Amritsar, or to the persistent

denial of self-government, he delays inquiry or he may give a small concession such as Diarchy. He makes vague promises—certain to be ignored—whilst at the same time he attacks the leaders of the people. By this means he strives to quench their spirit and to weaken their patriotism. He hopes, in short, that with time they may become disheartened.

In the second place, after some outwork has been won, he takes care to throw up another fortification and generally to strengthen his position. Thus in England, Labour, routed in direct action, looks to the polls for redress. What is the reply of Capital? It proposes to "reform" the House of Lords, that is, strengthen it and to make it a sure defence against a possible Labour majority in the House of Commons. If it succeeds, it will have foiled Labour on both counts.

After her loyalty in the War, the Rowlatt Act came to India as a sudden slap in the face. Its meaning is not, however, difficult to understand. The perils of the war had extorted from the bureaucracy the very guarded declaration of August 1917. They were forced

to yield this outwork to their opponents. But with the return of peace, when their alarm had subsided, they hastened to set up new bulwarks against democracy. The Rowlatt Act is one such bulwark; the rules under the Reform Act are another.

In short, the strategy of reformers is bad. It does not kindle the emotions of the people and so brings into action a bare tithe of the total forces available. In addition, it gives the enemy time to dissipate such enthusiasm as there is, to strengthen his defences, and sometimes even to regain lost ground.

III

THE WAY OF REVOLUTION

Revolution, in the sense defined, offers a bolder strategy. It strikes, not at some outwork, but straight at the citadel of the enemy. On its flag is blazoned a great ideal, something for which men will meet suffering with a smile, and look undaunted in the eyes of death. It sounds a trumpet which rouses the toiler from his toil, thrills his heart and illumines all his mind with the glory of a new-born land. All that is mean and selfish is burnt up in the fire of patriotism.

Examine any of the revolutions in history, and you will find that men who would in the ordinary way have lead quite humdrum lives, such as selling goods, or farming, suddenly do terrific deeds, and tread as giants the stage of history. Cromwell was a farmer, Washington

a planter, Janton an Advocate, Garibaldi, (when not fighting,) a small farmer. And not the leaders only. The whole people are exalted and moved to high emprise. Thus American farmers and tradesman successfully withstood the disciplined English regiments. The French utterly routed the forces which the crowned heads of Europe hurled against them, and quite recently the Russians have repelled the well-armed attacks made on them by the capitalist governments of France and England.

The spirit of man, *once he is roused,* can mock the might of kings and overcome the wildest odds. The difficulty is to rouse him. Surely in each man dwells a God. Custom, fear, and ignorance may, and often do, smoothen all that in him is divine. But when some great emotion comes to tear away the winding sheet from off the soul, then, at last, we behold all that man can dare, all that he can do.

Psychology, which has pried so deeply into the human mind, explains how this comes about. The emotions live in the conscious part of our mind. Civilisation, that is, the

stunted civilisation which is all that man has yet reached, represses these emotions and censors severely their working. In fact, the conscious, or reasoning part of our mind, and the unconscious are seldom at one. Hence mental conflicts, half-hearted efforts and finally lethargy. But when it happens that the two parts work in harmony, then are great things done. That is the secret of genius, and that is why in great popular movements, such as revolutions, the common man performs miracles. He does his possible, and his possible is very high indeed.

In war it is sound strategy always to strike at the heart of your enemy. To fritter away ones strength on the capture of minor towns, or the seizure of distant territory, may very often spell defeat. All plans should have for object the enemy's capital and nothing else. In the war between Japan and China, the Japanese having command of the sea, might have had their will of the whole rich sea-board of China. Yet they refused this tempting bait, because it would not have brought the end of the war any nearer. They concentrated on

Pekin, and quickly had all China at their feet. Contrary—wise, the despatch at a critical moment of a portion of the German army in France to expel the Russians from East Prussia lost perhaps the best chance the Germans had of victory.

So also in the bloodless war for liberty, it is vital to concentrate our efforts on the enemy's citadel, in other words to *wrest political power from his hands.* Once bereft of that power, officials will take their proper place and become useful members of the future Commonwealth of India. Now, a peaceful revolution does aim at a complete transfer of power. It intends, not a sham like diarchy, but a vital change of government. It stakes everything upon this, and will not be put off by promises or small concessions. If the bureaucracy sets up a barrier on the road to freedom, it does not chip off a few splinters here and there, leaving its strength much as before. Boldly it smites to earth the whole obstruction and marches through, free and unafraid.

Moreover, the great wave of feeling begotten by a revolution is not limited merely to the

field of government. Through all the regions of human thought—art, science, industry, education, morals—it bursts, vivifying, inspiring, animating. We can see this already in the Nationalist movement against drink and prostitution. Revolution tears the souls of many from their old moorings, and sets them voyaging, each a new Columbus, in search of new worlds. The real cause, both of Greek thought and of the Italian Renaissance, was that in those lands, for a limited time, men dared to see and think and reason for themselves. India is capable of just such a Renaissance, just such a rebirth, and when victory has crowned with her laurels the heroes of to-day, and the smoke and turmoil of the strife are past, such a rebirth she will surely see. This is the crown and glory of the great peaceful revolution to which Mahatma Gandhi now leads the people of India. This it is what will be the guerdon for all toil the exceeding great reward for every sacrifice, the salve of pains and sorrows. Then shall it be said that,—

'Millions whose lives in ice lay fast,
Have thoughts and smiles and tears.'

Aye, and minds to reason also. India once free may electrify the world and sway the civilisation of mankind. Three hundred million human beings, hitherto bound, repressed, down-trodden, will then swing bravely into the van of advancing humanity. Is not that worth while? Is not that worth a hundred fold all the suffering and the strife? In truth we labour at a world event and we shape a Titan's form. Officials and Moderates may prate of training and co-operation. We answer with a world unchained.

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